

Toward Middle East Peace Negotiations: Israeli Postwar Political-Military Options in an Era of Accelerated Change

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Israel enters a new peace process at a time of considerable short-term safety and long-term uncertainty. The social and demographic consequences of the Gulf War have not fully expressed themselves on the politics of the region, while the military role of Iraq in the future is hard to anticipate. Under such circumstances widely varying interpretations of Israel's security situation have emerged both in the U.S. and Israel.

In contrast to U.S. interpretations of the Gulf War, a distinct view has been emerging among Israeli policymakers:

- While the profile of missile warfare in the Middle East rose with Iraqi missile attacks on Tel Aviv, Desert Storm illustrated that the dominant form of warfare that still decisively determines political outcomes is the movement of conventional land armies. As long as conventional warfare remains the most critical component of the Middle Eastern military balance, the conditions affecting its outcome -- from topography to strategic depth -- will be vital to the security of Israel.
- The lessons of the Patriot deployment and Israel's policy of "restraint" offer limited precedent for guarantees of external security in lieu of secure borders in the peace process. Israel still seeks to be ultimate guarantor of its own security.
- Israel's approach to borders and security arrangements cannot be based on short-term developments like the crushing of Iraq. Israeli planning will have to assume a restoration of Iraqi power at a later date. The borders Israel will agree to must provide security for decades to come.

Israel will have to assume that peace with its neighbors will not be a Western European-style peace, but rather will continue to involve considerable security threats -- like the relations between the Arab states themselves. Territorial concessions in the Golan and West Bank, under such conditions, will entail a far higher degree of risk than was the case in the Sinai agreements. The prior establishment of the nature of peace to be offered and arms control options can help verify whether those risks can at all be assumed.

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